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ABSTRACT

The Scottish Office Education Department commissioned four interlinked studies of adult education between October 1991 and November 1993. The studies were designed to do the following: provide an overview of provision, progression, and guidance opportunities for adult learners in Scotland; supplement this overview with in-depth pictures of opportunities and kinds of provision; and study adults' reasons for returning to education. Findings indicated that one of the greatest strengths was the range and diversity of educational opportunities available. This diversity was also a weakness since the public lacked knowledge of the nature and extent of available educational opportunities. The organizations providing education for adults used a wide range of strategies to publicize educational opportunities; personal contact was the most effective but also the most expensive. Adults reported a number of reasons for returning to education, but most hoped that enhanced skills and qualifications would help them in the job market. They reported many different gains from participation. In many cases, the main result of these gains was a desire to progress to the next stage in education. Yet strategies for progression appeared to arise in an ad hoc way rather than as a result of clearly thought-out policy. Four issues were seen as important for encouraging and sustaining adults' participation in education: incentives to collaboration, special weighting for risky students, measurement of personal and social gains, and professional development. (YLB)

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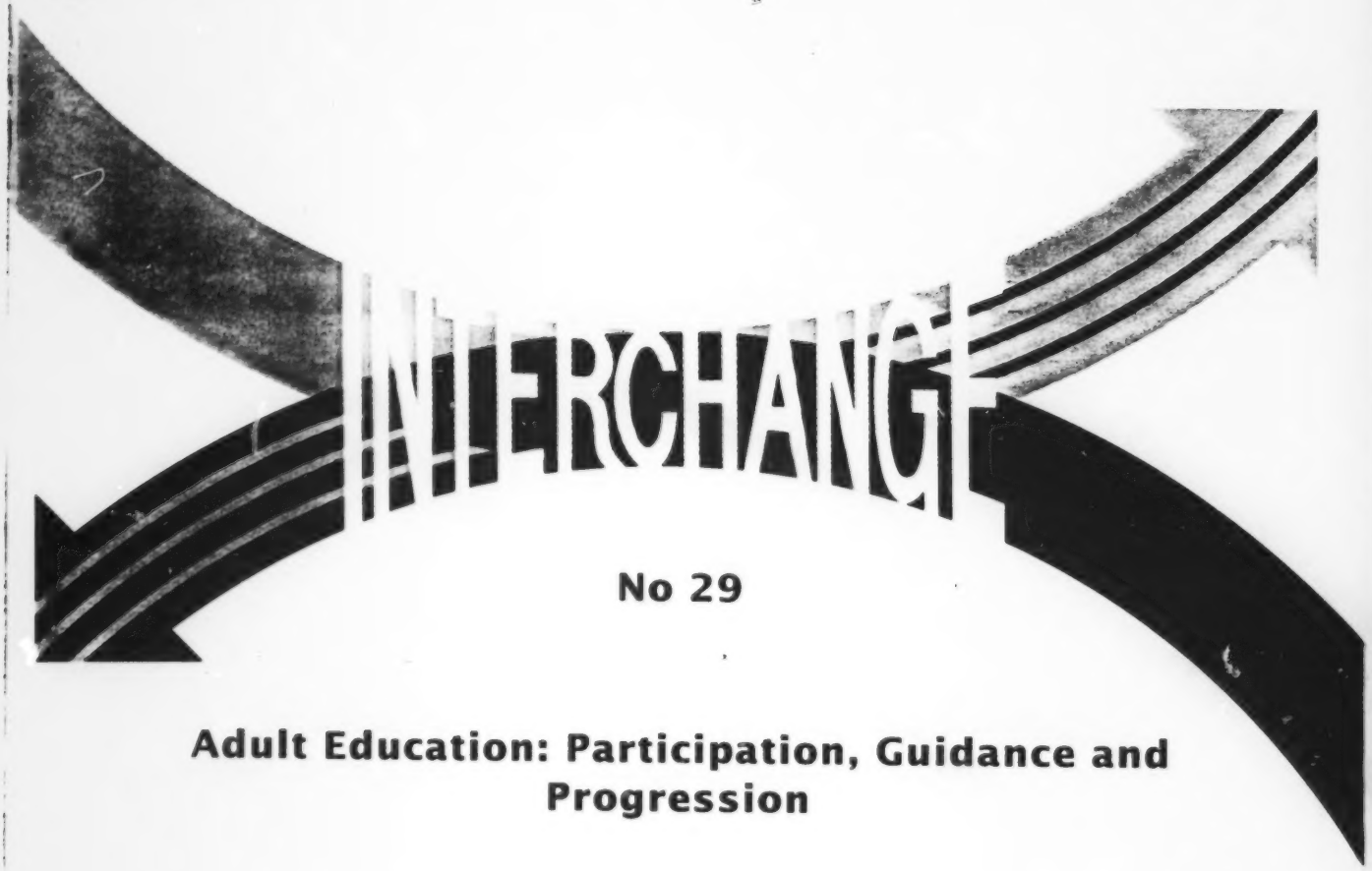

No 29

Adult Education: Participation, Guidance and Progression

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It is important that every opportunity should be taken to communicate research findings, both inside and outside the Scottish Office Education Department (SOED). Moreover, if research is to have the greatest possible impact on policy and practice, the findings need to be presented in an accessible, interesting and attractive form to policy makers, teachers, lecturers, parents and employers.

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Adult Education: Participation, Guidance and Progression

Pamela Munn

The Scottish Council for Research in Education

The Scottish Office Education Department commissioned four inter-linked studies of adult education which were carried out between October 1991 and November 1993. The studies were designed with three aims in view:

- *to provide an overview of provision, progression and guidance opportunities for adult learners in Scotland;*
- *to supplement the general overview with in-depth pictures of particular opportunities and kinds of provision;*
- *to study adults' reasons for returning to education.*

The studies

The four studies comprised:

- Fifty individual case studies of adults' experiences of participation, guidance and progression, in different educational settings.
- An exploration of progression opportunities for adult learners, involving an investigation of national and local strategies used to encourage progression.
- A study of guidance provision, including an investigation of the kinds of information and advice adults had received and whether guidance was helpful.
- A study of adults in schools.

The project teams and the methods used in the surveys are described in more detail on page 9. Each of the studies has produced a report which is complete in itself. This *Interchange* draws together the findings from them and is structured around the themes of participation opportunities, information and guidance, participation and progression. It concludes by identifying four key issues for the future encouragement of adult participation in education.

Participation opportunities

One of the great strengths of adult education is the range and diversity of educational opportunities available to those interested in participating. A wide range of organisations provide adult education, including the community education service, further education colleges, universities and other higher education institutions and voluntary bodies such as the Workers' Educational Association. In addition, there are those such as commercial organisations, employers and local enterprise companies where provision of education and training is only part of their remit. Opportunities are provided at a variety of levels, from non-certificated to degree and higher degree, in a variety of forms: full-time, part-time, open and distance learning and across an astonish-

ing array of subjects. Moreover, Scotland has been very successful in encouraging adult students to participate in daytime classes in secondary schools. The latest figures suggest that about 12,000 adults were enrolled as daytime students in 1992. Furthermore, 80% of secondary schools make such provision for adults, a unique characteristic of Scottish provision for adults.

Some indication of the diversity of opportunities is given in Tables 1 and 2 . Table 1 shows that further education offers the widest range of modes of provision. Other providers offering a more limited range often have a specific focus such as community based learning or provision for the long-term unemployed.

Table 1. *Types of provision offered by different providers of adult education*

Provider	Full time	Part time	Flexible	Distance	Outreach	*Provision for special groups
Higher education	●	●	◗	◗	○	○
Further education	●	●	●	◗	●	◗
Community education	○	●	●	○	●	●
Voluntary organisations	○	●	◗	○	●	◗
Secondary schools	◗	●	◗	○	○	○
Community based iniatives	◗	●	●	○	●	●
Open University	○	○	●	●	○	○
Open College	○	○	●	●	○	○
Broadcasters	○	○	●	○	○	○
STUC	○	●	◗	◗	○	●
LEC accredited providers	○	◗	◗	○	○	●
Employers	○	◗	◗	◗	○	●

* For example, community based special educational needs; the unemployed

● Main mode of provision ◗ Some provision ○ Little or no provision

Table 2 shows the wide diversity of levels and modes of accreditation. It is interesting to note that accreditation of prior learning, often regarded as particularly appropriate for adult learners, is not yet widely available.

This diversity of opportunities, however, is also a weakness. Many writers have highlighted the public's lack of knowledge of the nature and extent of the educational opportunities open to them. Furthermore, education professionals themselves frequently have little knowledge or understanding of the range of opportunities available within their own sector, far less other sectors. All the studies revealed that education providers recognised

Table 2. *Accreditation offered by different providers of adult education*

Provider	Non-formal	Non certificate	Non-advanced eg Nat Cert	Advanced eg HND	Degree and above	Competence based	APL*	Exams
Higher education	◗	◗	○	○	●	○	◗	●
Further education	○	○	●	●	○	●	◗	◗
Community education	●	●	◗	○	○	◗	○	○
Voluntary organisations	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
Secondary schools	◗	◗	●	○	○	◗	○	◗
Community based initiatives	●	●	◗	○	○	◗	○	○
Open University	◗	○	○	●	●	○	◗	●
Open College	●	●	◗	○	○	◗	○	○
Broadcasters	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
STUC	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
LEC accredited providers	◗	◗	●	◗	○	●	○	○
Employers	●	●	◗	◗	○	◗	○	◗

* Accreditation of prior learning

● Main mode of provision ◗ Some provision ○ Little or no provision

the need for high quality information and advice for adults not only about educational opportunities, but about the associated costs and benefits of returning to education. They also revealed some of the difficulties for adults in obtaining such advice.

Information and guidance

The organisations providing education for adults used a wide range of strategies to publicise educational opportunities: these included general advertising through the press and TV, leaflets, prospectuses, local press reports of individual success stories, providing drop-in centres where people could ask about courses, open evenings and community-based networks. There are also guidance services providing on-line information at publicly available computer points. There was consensus among providers that personal contact between an adult enquirer and a member of staff (guidance or other) was the most effective but also the most expensive way of providing information.

The expense appears to be justified, however. Adults themselves, although appreciating that information could come in different forms, welcomed a human point of contact. This was particularly important for adults if they were re-entering education for the first time. In the study of 50 adult returners almost half had sent for a prospectus, but this could be off-putting if it were the only means of contact, since these could be confusing or intimidating. Many adults lacking in confidence were greatly encouraged by a friendly, helpful voice over the telephone.

Personal contact between providers and potential students was deemed important by staff and adult learners alike:

"Locating an information point in Safeways won't work unless there is some means of intelligent referral through an individual."
(regional educational officer)

"[I phoned up] and the tone and friendliness of the voice over the phone was warming towards me... I thought 'Well, here perhaps is someone who will listen to me'. That is the pure and simple reason why I chose [this provider]."
(FE student)

Guidance services and adults themselves identified three types of guidance as important to encourage initial return:

- information to establish the kinds of courses that might be suitable;
- advice as to which course to take and at what level; and
- support, encouraging and strengthening the resolve to return to education.

In spite of providers' advertising and promotions, many adults frequently relied on their own prior knowledge about opportunities or that of relatives and friends. As a result they were often unaware of the options open to them. In any case the amount of education available varies considerably across Scotland. The most common reason why adults choose a particular provider was ease of access in terms of travelling distance from home. Most adults chose a provider and then chose a course. This highlights the importance of informing local communities about the opportunities provided by local schools, further and higher education institutions and the community education service. This locally available information needs to be readily accessible.

Adults often relied on their own and friends' knowledge of local education opportunities. As a result, choice was often limited:

"There wasn't any one person you could go to...My husband and I just discussed it ourselves, and read through the papers and talked to people who'd been on the courses before...If you don't know people, it can be difficult to know what to do for the best."
(FE student)

"There's no sources [of information] for people like me who desperately want to face my big fear and get educated... I just mucked around from one person to the next. Nobody knew anything. Spent my money on the telephone bill."
(FE student)

Making information available about courses is one aspect of guidance. Advice about academic, personal and especially financial matters can also be important to adult students in helping them to stay on course. Course tutors were the single most important point of contact for such advice and had a key 'front-line' guidance role. Yet, there were not many opportunities for staff to develop and update their knowledge and guidance skills; staff development in these areas was rare and planned provision for part-time staff seemed particularly scarce. New, specific adult guidance qualifications and training were eagerly awaited by the seven providers taking part in the guidance study as a means of enhancing quality guidance provision. Very few school staff had specialist training or qualifications in adult guidance.

Participation

Trying to explain why adults return to education is difficult. Adults in these studies reported a number of different reasons for returning to education but most were hoping that enhanced skills and qualifications would help them in the job market. Interestingly enough, for many adults these employment goals tended to change during participation to a desire to continue in education. In part this is, no doubt, a reflection of local labour market opportunities. It also reflects, however, the increased self-confidence, enjoyment and social gains reported by adult students. They began to see themselves in a different light, as 'not stupid after all'.

But participation could also make people feel dissatisfied with their lives as new aspirations and ambitions conflicted with those of family and friends.

Those concerned with progression strategies made a similar point, namely that successful adult education schemes could have a detrimental effect on

local communities as active participants could raise their sights and see a prime goal as moving out of particularly deprived areas. The paradox of a successful adult education strategy resulting in additional disadvantage for non-participants is well known. In many ways it reinforces the argument that education can only be part of a multi-pronged strategy for economic and social regeneration.

Adults reported that they had made a wide-ranging variety of personal and work related gains through this participation.

> *"I think it's given the me back to me. I am a person, not just a mother or a wife. I'm me I've got my own personality again."*
> (HE student)

> *"It surprises you...I think now I could face Goliath!"*
> (community education student)

Current explanations about participation fall into two broad categories. One kind of explanation is derived from questionnaire based surveys of adults which have attempted to categorise adults in terms of their motivation. A second kind is based on institutional and structural barriers to participation. Such barriers include the kind of provision on offer, admissions policies and finance.

This research, based on life histories of a small number of adults, suggested that adults return as a consequence of the interplay of the goals they set for themselves and the circumstances of their lives. Five key life circumstances were identified: age; gender; family circumstances; employment status and previous educational experience. The same life circumstances operate in different ways on individuals' decisions to return. However, policy level considerations are important too, in establishing a general climate in which participation is valued and quality provision is stressed. Many providers were concerned that recent initiatives might discourage collaboration among institutions and make some institutions cautious about enrolling adult students.

There is no single solution to encouraging participation. Thus it is important that a variety of kinds of providers, modes of provision and courses are offered to encourage a wide range of people to participate. For example, the most common reason given by women in this sample, for their choice of provision was that it fitted in with their domestic commitments. This did not mean that all women chose the same form of provision, even though they had school age children. Most were participating part-time but some were on full-time courses and some were following distance learning routes. This one example illustrates that individuals develop different ways of coping with their responsibilities and that it is probably mistaken of providers to believe that certain kinds of provision will appeal to particular kinds of adults.

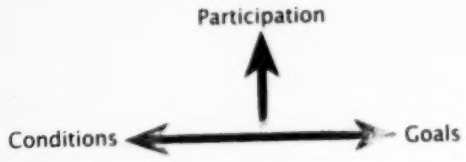
Adults' gains could also breed dissatisfaction:

> *"Obviously, it would help finances if I got a job. But now that I've done all this history, I feel I should be doing something that I'm interested in. Not because I have to but because I want to, because it's interesting. I don't want to just get a job in a shop — now I've learned this, I feel I've more to offer."*
> (community education student)

The life history data from adult participants suggested that one way of thinking about participation was as an interplay of adults' goals and the conditions or circumstances affecting their lives. Goals could be short or long term and conditions include not only those personal to the individual but those at a more macro level, such as the availability or opportunities and the predisposition of educational institutions to admit adult students. This is not to imply that participation is always a rational process, with goals determining participation. Some of the adults participated largely because of a particular set of circumstances, such as the provider's child care facilities and once 'through the door', thought about what course(s)

to take. Furthermore goals and conditions interact and influence each other (Figure 1). This way of thinking about participation is offered as an alternative to the typologies which are a major strand in the literature on participation.

Figure 1. Model of participation



Moreover, adults could be doing courses labelled vocational for personal reasons. One adult was doing a chemistry degree for personal enjoyment and satisfaction rather than the expected job related reasons. In contrast, adults doing non-certificated courses for recreational reasons often regarded them as a first step, testing the water, before enrolling in certificate courses which would enhance their employment prospects.

Sustaining participation

Adults were highly motivated to stay on their courses. Having taken the plunge of returning to education they wanted to keep going. Help from family and friends was important, especially in looking after children. Participation could strain family relationships and adults mentioned self-help groups of students as one valuable way of coping with the stress and strains which could accompany a return to education. The single thing which adults appreciated most, however, was an encouraging friendly staff.

From the providers' perspective, adult students were generally seen in a positive light, as well-motivated and eager to learn, often contributing usefully in tutorials and group work. Schools saw adults as positive role models for pupils, emphasising the importance of education. Many schools reported that adults contributed to a better atmosphere. Some institutions, however, had not been able to provide amenities which part-time students would have welcomed. These included extended library opening times, quiet study areas and child care facilities. Adults in further and higher education tended to be dissatisfied with the facilities available to them.

Informal and formal support of all kinds greatly helped adults to sustain their studies and a lack of support could jeopardise participation:

> *"The family were quite proud of the fact that I was doing it...so they put themselves out to accommodate me. And I feel quite good about that."*
> (school student)

> *"I'm afraid the teachers couldn't care less if we were there or not...[It's] so negative...it's spoiling it."*
> (FE student)

Progression

The adult learners in this study reported many different gains from participation in education, such as increased confidence, new friends and interests as well as new knowledge and skills. In many cases, the main result of these gains was a desire to progress to the next stage in education, despite the fact that this had not been an initial goal. Progression did not necessarily imply participation in more advanced courses. Staying at the same course level also counted as progression. Providers saw participation in education as something to be encouraged and sustained, rather than as a 'one-off' event.

Yet strategies for progression appeared to arise in an *ad hoc* way rather than as a result of clearly thought out policy. There were few examples of explicit, written policies on progression, although policy makers tended to point to the wide-range of opportunities in existence as evidence of a policy commitment to progression. They highlighted three common features of *'de facto'* policies:

- collaboration among providers and between education and industry;
- open access provision to encourage progression from non-participation to participation;
- encouraging adults to develop their own learning programmes.

Indeed, some providers tried to build information on progression opportunities into programmes. For instance, a voluntary organisation encouraged students to follow an eight week module on further opportunities. The module included topics for discussion such as 'Looking Forward', 'How to Move On' and 'My Map for the Future' . The development of a modular structure to many programmes means that this kind of approach becomes more feasible. It could also be an economical and effective way of providing guidance to many students, given appropriate staff development in this area. As Table 3 shows, many of the adult students did not know about the guidance services offered by providers. There was frustration over the isolation many adults felt when making decisions about the use they were going to make of their new skills and qualifications.

Providers were concerned that progression in education should be sustained and encouraged and that devised a variety of strategies for guiding students:

"*We are in education to serve the learners; we are not serving them if we supply only dead-end course.*"
(FE assistant principal)

"*Progression structures are a lot like Hampton Court maze. On the outside it is daunting...You have to be in the maze and be able to display the pathways to potential users.*"
(Project training coordinator)

Table 3. *Sources of guidance for future plans*

Guidance source	Number of respondents (n=50)
Don't know of any guidance	18
Course lecturers/tutors	11
Future provider	6
Providers' careers departments	5
Family/friends	4
Self-reliance	3
Providers' office staff	2
Employers	1

Looking at the initiatives which had progression as a clear goal revealed the following ingredients contributing to success:

- a structure which highlights the benefits of collaboration among providers;
- an emphasis on guidance before entry, during the course and before leaving;
- flexible learning routes;
- clear maps of possible progression routes;
- consultation and negotiation with participants;
- systematic evaluation of qualitative and quantitative outcomes used to develop provision.

Adults required guidance for progression and they felt frustrated by their lack of knowledge of the opportunities afforded them by their new-found skills and qualifications:

"*I'm not sure what options are available just now...I'm actually needing quite a lot more information about what...kind of courses are available...I would like somebody to sit down with me and tell me what options are available.*"
(School student)

Key issues

Each report of the four studies -- on participation, progression, guidance and adults in schools — comments on the policy implications arising from the research. These of course reflect the opinions of the researchers and are offered for discussion and debate. The following issues are seen as important for encouraging and sustaining adults' participation in education:

- The importance of collaboration among institutions in encouraging initial participation and subsequent progression needs to be recognised. Collaborative arrangements will be strained by a system which is driven by student-led funding which encourages each institution to recruit and support only its own students. The provision of impartial information and advice is particularly important in this context.

Should incentives to collaboration be developed?

- Performance indicators which highlight students' completion rates, examination performance and employment destinations may discourage institutions, particularly in higher education, from accepting 'risky' students with non-traditional entry qualifications.

Should such students be given a special weighting in compiling performance profiles for institutions?

- In emphasising vocational qualifications and evaluating educational quality, personal and social gains for individuals and communities can be neglected. These are difficult outcomes to measure accurately and reliably.

If we are to measure what we value rather than value what we measure, how can these aspects of education be highlighted?

- Providers with formal policies on guidance and progression opportunities were more able to compare actual provision with stated aims. Where policies were lacking it was more difficult to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of provision and argue for resources. In addition, the unpredictability of funding from year to year was a problem for guidance services. A key element in encouraging and sustaining participation is a well-trained staff.

How can current opportunities for professional development be exploited and new opportunities promoted for adult education staff in general and part-time tutors in particular?

The project teams

This *Interchange* arises from four research studies which were designed to be compete in themselves but which also informed each other. The research team comprised Nick Arney, Amy Blair, Kevin Lowden, Joanna McPake, Janet Powney and Pamela Munn at SCRE and Lyn Tett, originally at the Scottish Community Education Council and now at Moray House Institute of Education. In addition Anne Docherty, Alan Ducklin, Murray McVicar and Chris Pilley contributed to the work by collecting data in other ways. Final responsibility for the content of the *Interchange*, however, lies with the author.

Research methods

Experiences of participation, guidance and progression

Fifty adults were interviewed in depth about their reasons for participation, the help they had received in making decision about participation, their future plans and their history of participation in educational opportunities. The adults were drawn from different kinds of provision — schools, further and higher education institutions and community education — and the research looked for common themes emerging from adults in the different institutions, courses and modes of study.

Progression opportunities for adult learners

A general overview of progression opportunities, was obtained through documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews with 25 people who had strategic responsibilities for particular opportunities. This was complemented by a more detailed study of progression opportunities in one region involving semi-structured interviews with 27 people who had either management or policy responsibilities for progression or who taught on course with a clearly identified progression component.

Guidance provision

Here there were three main strands: (1) a national survey of existing provision for adults; (2) cases studies of seven providers of guidance, identified as offering good practice, exploring the organisational and other features they believed enabled them to provide a quality service; (3) a survey of 158 adults who had used the services of one of the seven guidance providers. The survey explored the kinds of information and advice sought and received, their quality and how adults had learned about the existence of guidance services and perceptions of how guidance services might be improved.

Adults in schools

Telephone interviews were carried out with senior staff in 72 schools making substantial day time provision for adults, to explore their policy and practice in recruiting and facilitating adult provision. This was supplemented by a postal survey of 396 adults attending daytime classes in 75 secondary schools.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Scottish Office Education Department who funded the study.

Full reports

Further details of the research can be found in the four reports, available from the Scottish Council for Research in Education, 15 St John Street, Edinburgh EH8 8JR.

Facing Goliath: adults experiences of participation, guidance and progression in education.
A Blair, J McPake and P Munn, 1993. Price £8.50.

Negotiating the labyrinth: progression opportunities for adult learners.
P Munn, L Tett, N Arney, 1993. Price £5.00.

Where do we go from here? Adult education guidance in Scotland.
K Lowden, J Powney, 1993. Price £8.50.

Adults in schools.
A Blair, J McPake, P Munn, 1994. Price £8.50.

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If you have views on ***Interchange*** and/or wish to find out more about RIU's research programme contact the Research and Intelligence Unit (RIU), Scottish Office Education Department, Room 4/48, New St Andrew's House, Edinburgh EH1 3SY.

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